They're Coming For You 4

Scary Stories that SCREAM to be Read ...Forthwith

O. Penn-Coughin

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Introduction

The stories in this collection are meant to be read in the quiet horror of your mind or as read alouds. Some include instructions **[like this]**.

If anyone needs reminding, this book is not to be taken seriously. It's all in good fun.

O. Penn-Coughin

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They're Coming For You 4

Scary Stories that SCREAM to be Read… Forthwith

by

O. Penn-Coughin

Van Full of Clowns

"Clowns!" the shouts rang out. "Run! The clowns are coming!"

Some said the van was white. Others said it was black.

But the stories agreed on one point: evil clowns were on the loose, looking to do who knows what. Up to no good, you could bet your best Carl Yastrzemski card on that.

The sightings first began in the winter of '81.

By early spring, every kid with any sense was spooked out of his mind. Man, even most of the senseless ones were jumpy.

Descriptions were vague. The ones who had been lucky enough to get away had a hard time saying exactly what the clowns looked like.

Were the clowns *real* or just evil doers in circus drag? Was there just one van or a whole fleet of ‘em? Questions, rumors, facts, and fear bled together and poured into our dreams.

No matter how much the teacher said so-and-so had moved away, we knew the truth: the clowns had gotten another one. A van full of clowns was seen at the corner of 3rd and Dawson. In the parking lot of Morningwood Park. In front of the school.

The clowns had chased little Jimmy O’Brien down his block. That’s why he fell and cracked his skull on the icy sidewalk

that day in April. I don't know for a fact if that's how it happened. All I can tell you is Jimmy was never the same after that.

Some of the older kids would joke about it.

"Run! The Clowns are coming!" they'd scream at the younger kids.

"They'll get you and blow you up like a balloon."

"Yeah, they'll twist you into a balloon animal till you explode."

Sometimes they would inflate their empty lunch bags and sneak up behind someone and pop them.

[Clap hands loudly.]

"Clowns got another one!" they would shout.

More than one kid needed to change his underwear after that. They'd run to the office, crying, trying to hold in what had already leaked out.

"Run! The Clowns are coming! Ha, ha, ha, haaa!"

But even the older kids were scared, I think.

The cops said there was nothing to worry about. Just another case of mass hysteria.

Maybe the whole thing was made up by parents trying to get their children to make it home on time, to listen, to behave. The usual stuff. Maybe it was just another variation on the old boogey man stories. Fooled again. Could be.

But I think it was real.

I never actually saw the clowns myself, and I can't prove it, but I know they got me, I mean Mikey, my best friend.

One day walking home from school he saw an old white van pull up in front of his house. Someone got out and ran inside. Mikey was too far away to tell who it was. The van took off down the street.

When Mikey walked in, he found his stepfather. He came out of the bathroom, breathing hard.

"Hey, sport," he said.

His hair was sweaty and pasted to his forehead. He had a few traces of what looked to be white makeup on his face.

Mikey must have gone pale then.

"What's wrong, sport?"

Mikey looked down.

His stepfather was still wearing the big floppy red shoes.

He could tell that Mikey had seen them.

"I'm sorry you had to find out about this, Mikey," he said, coming toward him. "You're a good boy. I'm real sorry."

The shoes closed in. Closer and closer they came.

No one ever saw Mikey again.

Until now…

[Hum some circus music.]

AAAAH!!!

Lazy Bones

He never had much energy when he was alive.

Now that he was dead…

[Yawn and stretch.]

Forget about it.

Chindi

“That old woman is half-blind,” Blake said. “You distract her and I’ll take that cigar box where she keeps her money.”

The old wrinkled woman was sitting behind a blanket covered with turquoise and silver jewelry. Russell walked up to her.

“*Ya'at'eeh*, grandmother,” he said. “How’s business?”

“Today has been a good day,” she said.

Blake came around behind her and picked up the cigar box. Some of the coins inside clinked together.

The old woman didn't seem to hear.

"*Hágoónee'*," Russell said, walking back to the car. "Goodbye."

Blake got behind the wheel and hit the gas, sending dirt and gravel flying.

"Candy from a baby, bro," he said, throwing the box on the seat between them.

A few miles up the highway they turned off on to a dirt road. Blake parked the car behind a large boulder.

"Let's go over there and see how we did," he said pointing to an old hogan.

"All right," Russell said.

They walked over the slickrock and soon reached the structure. It appeared to be abandoned.

Blake went inside. Russell hesitated for a moment and then followed.

The small hogan was filled with furniture and personal belongings as if someone still lived there—except that a thick layer of dust and cobwebs covered everything.

"Why is all this stuff still here?" Blake said.

"The owner probably died here," Russell said. "My people believe the *chindi*, the dead person's ghost, still haunts the place where someone dies."

"Your people believe a lot of weird stuff," Blake said.

"I suppose so," Russell said.

Blake opened the cigar box. He emptied the contents on the bed and started counting.

"Nine dollars and 42 cents," he said and shook his head. "We're so rich."

He smashed the cigar box against the wall. A large black spider scurried into a hole.

“Well, here’s your share after gas money,” Blake sighed, handing Russell three wrinkled dollar bills.

“Let’s get out of here.”

A warm gust of wind slammed the door shut behind them. A raven flew by casting its shadow on Blake’s face.

“Man, it’s hot,” he said.

The air baked and sizzled over the rocks. In the distance a dust devil had formed. The two teens stood and stared at it as it grew and moved in their direction.

“I’ve never seen one last this long,” Russell said. “It’s a big one too.”

The large tornado-looking counterclockwise swirl of dirt and sand was now almost on top of them.

"I need a big soda," Blake said, turning to leave. "Let's go."

"No," Russell suddenly said in a shaky voice. "It can't be."

"What, dog?" Blake said.

"In the dust devil," Russell whispered. "*Chindi*."

Blake didn't see anything. He turned and saw that his friend's face had gone pale.

"It's just sand, white man," Blake said. "There ain't no ghost in there."

"*Chindi!*" Russell said. "Don't you see it? Don't you see it?"

He started running.

“Take the money. I don’t want it. Take it! Take—”

The dust devil now passed through Blake. Before he had to close his sandblasted eyes, he thought he saw Russell jump off the edge of the canyon.

A few minutes later, still rubbing his eyes, Blake walked over and looked down.

Hundreds of feet below, on a bloodstained rock, lay Russell’s smashed and broken body. He was dead.

Blake stumbled back away from the edge.

***

Blake died less than a year later. He wasted away. The doctors were never able to find out what was wrong with him. In the

end, he was nothing more than skin and bones. And then dust.

Bloody World

The eye in the blender was looking back at me. And then I realized I was the one in the blender looking out at the whir… at the whir… at the whir… at the *whirl*… at the *whirl*… at the *whirl*… going by… going by… going *bye*…

The Return of El Cuco

A new family had moved into the little house on the corner.

The first night in the house the little girl heard a noise. It was coming from the wall behind her bed.

“Help me, please,” a tiny voice whispered. “*El Cuco* has trapped me in here.”

The girl started crying and called to her parents.

“There’s nothing, Elena,” her mother said. “It’s just a little hole in the wall.”

But every night, the girl heard the same thing. The little voice called out for help.

"*El Cuco* has me trapped," it said. "Help me."

The father became tired of his daughter's tears.

"Basta de tonterías, Elena," he sighed. "Enough of this nonsense. I will sleep in here tomorrow night."

The next night the father slept on the floor of Elena's bedroom.

"Help me, please," a tiny voice whispered. "*El Cuco* has trapped me in here. Help me, please."

The father got up and put his ear to the hole.

"Help me…" he heard again.

“I told you, *papá*,” Elena said. “I knew it wasn’t *mi imaginación*.”

The next morning the father got his tools and started ripping at the wall around the little hole.

He dropped to his knees when he saw it.

There, behind the wall, was the skeleton of a little boy.

What's He Building Up There?

The sound of the power saw cut through the night.

"What's he building up there?" Jerry said, looking out the window across the street and up at the house on the hill.

"He's not building anything," Frank said. "There's no hammering. Just the sawing."

Jerry couldn't remember when it had started, but it seemed to have been going on for weeks. And Frank was right. There was

never any hammer sounds. All that sawing and no hammering. It was beyond strange.

"Then what's he sawing up there?" Jerry said. "And don't you suppose he could be using glue to hold things together?"

Their mom called up from downstairs.

"It's time for bed, boys."

"Good night, mom," Jerry and Frank said.

"I'm gonna find out," Frank whispered from his bed across the room. "Tomorrow night I'm sneaking up there."

Jerry didn't say anything. He started shaking under the covers.

"You comin' with?" Frank asked.

"Yeah, I'm in," Jerry said, hoping his brother couldn't hear the fear in his voice.

The next night, after the sun went down, the boys rode their bikes up the hill. They set them up against a tree by the end of the road and started walking through the woods. The house was dark, but there was a light coming from the garage.

It was quiet. Strangely quiet.

The door creaked a little when Frank pushed it open. He stuck his head in.

"C'mon," he whispered. "No one's here."

The two boys walked in.

There were piles of wood everywhere. But then they saw what the man had been building. Coffins. Coffins of all sizes lined the walls.

As they got closer, Jerry stumbled over a piece of wood and bumped into Frank.

“Shhh,” Frank said. “Watch where you’re going.”

Jerry saw that there were words carved into some of the lids.

“Edgar Wilson,” Frank read. “Hey, isn’t that the kid at the end of our street?”

Jerry didn’t answer. He was standing in front of another coffin a few feet away.

Linda Tomasi was carved on it.

“Look,” Jerry finally said, pointing.

Frank came over.

“What the—”

Linda Tomasi was their mother’s name!

There were two smaller coffins next to it.

“Jerry Tomasi,” Jerry said, standing in front of his own coffin.

“Frank Toma—” Frank began and stopped when he smelled something.

“Hey, you were right,” Frank said.

The strong smell of glue now filled the room.

“Let’s get out of here,” Jerry said.

Right before they could turn to leave, each boy felt a large, wet hand on his shoulder. The air now seemed to drip with glue. Then the light went out.

“I’ve been expecting you,” a voice whispered in their ears.

No one heard their screams over the familiar sound of the power saw—*rrrrrr*—AAAAH!!!

Shayton House

No one had ever spent an entire night in Shayton House without dying or going mad.

But that didn't stop people from trying.

They had been trying off and on since the house was built in 1864.

According to the legend, the original owner, Everett Shayton, had died during his first night in the house. The servants found him on the south lawn the next morning. He had either fallen or jumped from the roof.

At last count, more than 100 people had lost their minds and 23 had died in the house. Twenty-four including Shayton.

The most recent victim was a 14-year-old boy who broke into the house last October. To keep him company, the teen brought his pet parrot.

At first nothing happened. But shortly after midnight, a voice started calling from somewhere out in the night.

“I’m coming for you,” it moaned soft and low.

A few minutes later the voice was closer.

“I’m coming for you,” it said again.

It sounded like it was out in the front yard.

Suddenly, the boy’s parrot spoke.

“You’re not coming for me, caw,” it said. “Not for me.”

This was particularly unsettling for the boy because he had had the bird for four years and this was the first time it had said anything.

The voice called again. It now sounded like it was right outside the front door.

“I’m coming for you,” it moaned.

“Not for me, caw,” the parrot answered. “You’re not coming for me.”

“Shhh,” the boy whispered. “The Ghost of Shayton will hear you.”

“What do I care?” the parrot squawked loudly. “It’s not coming for me, caw.”

Equal parts angry and spooked, the boy ran upstairs and into one of the bedrooms.

“I’m coming for you,” the voice said from the foot of the stairs.

“Not for me… what do I care?… he’s in here, Shayton,” the parrot said. “Caw, caw, caw.”

The boy thought about choking the parrot, but before he could do anything he heard the Ghost of Shayton open the bedroom door.

“I’m coming for you,” it said again.

Leaving the bird on a chair, the boy hid in the closet.

“He’s in there, in there, in there,” he heard the parrot saying from a few feet away. “Make me your servant, Shayton, caw, caw, caw.”

“You were right—I wasn’t coming for you,” the voice said. “But no one likes a stool pigeon.”

The boy heard a terrible ruckus and then all was quiet.

In the morning they found the boy, still in the closet, laughing. His mouth, chin, and chest were covered in blood and feathers.

He had gone insane and appeared to have eaten the parrot.

“It was Shayton!” he screamed over and over. “He’ll tell you. Go ask Shayton!”

He carried on like this and denied it vehemently, but a stool analysis later revealed the remains of the bird.

Shayton House had claimed two more victims.

[This story works better if you can pull a feather out of your mouth at the end.]

Me Zombie

Me zombie. That what they call me. Me not know what it mean. Me not know what make me how me be or why me speak like me do. Me know me hungry. For brains. *Braaaains.* Your *braaaains*… AAAAAH!!!

Townes the Clown

Seems like another lifetime ago. This was way back in the days when I had the world by the ba—sorry, I suppose there might be young children present—all right, tail then. I was the king of the rodeo circuit. I had yet to meet a bull that was my equal. I was at the top of my game. My mind was razor sharp and my body was harder than Bulgarian grammar. I had it so goin' on.

I was 23. And the best was yet to come.

And then it all went to hell.

I was too young to be a has been. But that's exactly what I became. It all happened in an instant. And it all started with a clown.

I had never given clowns a second thought. Had no feelings for 'em either way. Never was scared of 'em as a child neither.

But that was before I met *him*.

"Hey, cowboys," the boss said one day. "I want you to meet our new rodeo clown. This here's Townes. Townes the Clown."

He shook my hand and looked into my eyes and I knew at that moment that nothing would ever be the same again. Don't ask me how. I just knew.

He was a big man. Not fat, just big. Tall. Wide shoulders. Big chested.

And the fact that he was so big made the next thing stand out even more and appear

even more freakish. You see, Townes the Clown had a small, little baby head. Now, I know babies have big heads. For babies. But you stick the biggest baby head on a big ol' growns man and you've got the makin' of one true freak. And that's how he was. Here he was bigger 'n a football lineman, and with this little bitty head sitting way up high. Little eyes, little ears, little nose, little mouth to match. Freakish.

Without his makeup, he was just plain odd looking. But with it, man, he became someone else. Someone, *something* evil. Pure evil. Even the meanest, craziest bull backed away slowly when it saw that little, evil head.

His makeup was simple. He painted his face white with black circles around the

eyes. Then he put a little dab of red on the tip of that little nose. And smeared a lot of it sloppily on his little lips. He topped it off with a little kid's straw hat. And that was it. *Scary city.*

The weird thing—one of 'em anyway—was that no one else seemed to see it. The evil that lived in those eyes, I mean. Everyone took a shine to Townes the Clown. And he became a crowd favorite. I couldn't understand why I was the only one who could see him for what he was.

Right after I met him, I started being thrown by every bull I rode. I was flyin' through the air left and right. I couldn't hold on for the life of me.

Going down in the dirt was new to me. I didn't know how to break my falls, had

never learned. I was in shock and did a poor job of protecting myself from the bulls. But every time I went down, *he* was there to rescue me. On more than one occasion, I'm pretty sure he saved my life. Always sending me a creepy, little smile from that creepy, little head.

"Be careful now," he would say in a high-pitched child's voice. "Wouldn't want anything to happen to yoooou."

I tried all fashion of good luck charms and down home remedies, but it was no use. Besides I knew luck had nothing to do with it. It had everything to do with Townes the Clown.

Things went on like this for I don't know how long. Until one day I decided I would

do something about it. I didn't know why I hadn't thought of it sooner.

I snuck into his motel room before he got there. I waited under the bed. I heard him come in. I waited quietly. *So quietly.* When he started snoring, I waited some more. My hands were steady. My breathing was even. My heartbeat was slow and measured.

I finally slid out from under the bed and stood up slowly. *So slowly.* After watching him sleep for a while, I went to work.

I took what I had come for. I took my revenge.

Later I stood at the bridge under a full moon, breathing in the freedom. I was free of Townes the Clown. Free. Forever.

I opened up the plastic bag and emptied it over the side. I watched it splash down and bob and float downriver. I stood there for a long time, till it disappeared, bound for Mexico I suppose.

I woke up the next morning and felt like I hadn't felt in a long time. I felt the old confidence return. I had my life back again.

But when I got to the rodeo, Townes was there. He was there as usual with his little head.

Except that I had taken it. I looked down and could still see the blood on my hands to prove it. It had not been a dream. I swear it. Nor had I imagined it. But it was definitely back. Somehow, he had sewed it back on. I could see the sloppy stitching around the neck.

Townes just winked at me and smiled his creepy, little smile from that creepy, little head.

I knew then that I would never be free of him. I knew too that he wouldn’t ever let me die. He was having too much fun.

‘Course, I tried other things through the years. I killed him on several occasions. But he always came back. I tried runnin' away. But he always found me and brought me back.

Through it all he always kept smiling.

He’s smiling still.

[Now smile a creepy, little smile at your audience. After a while scream if you think it’s called for.]

4:55

It was raining hard and John Calhoun was driving fast. He rounded a corner and saw the young woman at the last second. He slammed on the brakes. She looked up and smiled. He didn't know her but there was something about that smile. Something so familiar.

"I'm sorry," he called out through the downpour. "Can I give you a lift?"

"Sure," she said. "I'm headed down to Sears."

“My name’s John,” he said after she got in. “John Calhoun.”

“Nice to meet you, John Calhoun. I’m Sarah.”

She smiled again.

They drove in silence through the rain.

When they were almost there, John Calhoun looked over at the young woman and noticed that she was beginning to disappear—right there in her seat. He stopped the car.

“Hey, wait a minute,” he said. “What’s going on here?”

And then it hit him. It was just like one of those stories.

“You’re a ghost, right?” he said suddenly. “You’re *dead*.”

“Well, yes,” she said right before completely fading away. “But so are you.”

John Calhoun didn’t understand any of what was happening. He ran his hand through his hair and then looked at his watch.

4:55. The date was stuck on February 14, 1991.

“I’m gonna have to get this thing fixed,” he said.

And then slowly, through a fog, he started remembering. He started remembering what had happened on February 14, 1991.

It was raining hard and he was driving fast. He rounded a corner and saw the young woman at the last second. He slammed on the brakes. She looked up and smiled. He

didn’t know her but there was something about that smile. Something so familiar.

He slammed on the brakes. Too late. Then he swerved. Again too late. She flew through the air. John Calhoun lost control on the wet pavement. The car slammed into a tree and caught on fire.

He looked down at his watch. It read 4:55.

All these years later, it still read 4:55.

And then he smelled something and looked down. His arm was on fire. The flames soon engulfed the car. John Calhoun’s world turned red and black. And then everything disappeared.

For another year.

Hold the Pepperoni: The Prequel

“Look at those pigs,” the first demon said.

“Yeah, what about ‘em?” the second demon said.

“I bet we could really sow some havoc as pigs,” the first one said.

“Oh, man,” the third demon said. “We could sneak up to people as pigs and they would be thinking ‘look at that stupid pig’ or ‘what a cute little piggy’ or some such and

the next thing they *don't* know, we've possessed them."

"Right," the first demon said. "Let's go for it."

"That little black one is mine," the second one said.

"I've got that big fella over there," said the third.

"All right," the first said. "I'll take the sow with that large litter of young'uns."

"I believe the term is *farrow*," the second said.

"Now that's really interesting," said the first demon. "As usual, I don't know what in blazes you're talking about, but I'm sure it's really interesting."

A few minutes later, three of the pigs began acting most peculiar.

The other pigs got spooked and stampeded away from them toward the hills.

“What got into them?” the third pig said.

“Beats me,” the little black one said and chuckled.

“Let’s stay focused,” the momma pig said. “I believe we could have some serious fun with that shepherd over there.”

“I wonder what those three pigs are up to,” the sheepherder said putting down his staff. “Looks like they’re heading this way.”

Backyard Man

They buried the old man in the family plot at the edge of the large backyard.

“Ashes to ashes and all that jazz,” Bob said, handing the gravedigger some crumpled bills.

That night Bob looked out the window toward the grave.

“There’s something moving out there,” he said to the cat.

The cat arched its back and hissed at the air.

There was a moaning and there was a groaning coming from out in the night.

Lightning flashed and thunder crashed. The cat arched its back like an illegal U-turn and something scratched at the door.

Bob gripped his glass tight.

The scratching turned into a knock.

“At least it’s human,” Bob whispered to the ice in his glass, trying to sound as cool as the jazz coming from the sax player on his stereo. But Bob wasn’t cool. He was up pretty tight. Another knock and the glass shattered in Bob’s hand from the death grip he had on it.

The cat flew out through the closed window into the night trailing glass and hair and blood.

There was another knock. Louder. And then a voice.

“Bob, it’s me,” it said. “It’s your old grandpa.”

Bob got real quiet, pretending no one was home.

“It’s cold in the ground, Bob,” the voice said. “Let me in so I can warm up by the fire.”

Bob said nothing.

“Bob?”

The knocking started again.

I guess I should let him in, Bob thought after a while.

He walked over and opened the door.

There in the shadows stood the old man. He looked the same as he did when he was alive.

But he wasn’t the same.

“I’m cold,” the old man said, stepping inside. “And I’m hungry.”

He licked his lips and looked at Bob with bulging, ravenous eyes.

The next morning the old man buried what was left of Bob.

Then, thinking better of it, he dug him up and made soup.

Out of the Blue

The old graveyard had been a peaceful place for as long as any of the residents could remember. But all that changed when someone decided to build the new elementary school right next to it.

First came the bulldozers and the earthmovers. Then came the carpenters and the cement pourers. Then came the teachers and the children.

This was turning out to be one screwed up final resting place. What with bells

ringing and all that screaming and cursing. And that was just the adults.

Some of the cemetery's oldest ghosts had been there since the days of the Oregon Trail, and they weren't at all happy about these recent developments.

"We survived untold river crossings, all kind of disease, Indians, and accidents," Dale Matthews said. "We've come too far to end up like this."

"Know what you mean, pardner," Tom Reynolds said. "Hard to get any sleep 'round here these days."

"Maybe it's time to pack up the boys again," Dale said.

"Maybe soes," Tom said. "Maybe soes."

One Friday afternoon in late April, out of the blue a cloud of dust blew across the

school playground. What sounded like animals and calls of “Yaw!” came from its direction, but no one saw anything.

Suddenly a teacher screamed and fell to the ground. The children yelled and scattered in all directions.

By the time help arrived, the woman was dead. Her tongue, thick and blue, hung out of her mouth. Her eyes bulged with eternal terror. Her chest appeared to have been crushed. It looked like she had been run over by something awfully heavy. Investigators later found some odd looking ruts in the mud a few feet from her body. It almost looked like they had been made by wagon wheels.

Yaw!

Gee!

Haw!
[Make moaning ox sounds.]
Yaw!
Gee!
Haw!
[Make moaning ox sounds.]
Yaw!
Gee!
AAAAH!!!

There Was Nothing There

There was nothing there.

A boy stood on a grave. He screamed for no reason.

There was nothing there. There wasn't even a grave. There wasn't even a boy. And there wasn't even a story.

There was nothing there. Nothing there. No need to scream. No one to scream. No need to write a story. No one to write a story. No one.

No need.

No story.

No… AAAAH!!!

A Difference of Opinion

Soccer practice had ended. Four players sat in the grass behind one of the goals.

"CR9 is a woman," Tim said.

"Well, Messi's a moody little dwarf with a dead stump for a right leg," Nuno shot back.

"Wayne Rooney is the man," Clive said.

"Get real," Tim said. "Wayne Rooney? Wayne Rooney is a butt-faced Nani's boy."

"All three are actually quite similar," Poindexter said. "Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, and Wayne Rooney play great for

their club teams but have had disappointing careers for their countries."

"Take a stand, why don't you, you turd," Clive said.

"All right," Poindexter said. "If I had to choose one striker—and that's what you're talking about here because you can't seriously compare players in different positions—I would base it on combined performance for club and country and—"

"Just pick someone already before we all get as old as Sir Alex Freakin' Ferguson," Tim said.

"Okay, David Villa or Diego Forlán," Poindexter said. "Or a 2002-2006 Ronaldinho. Although the two current players that are most valuable to their teams,

in my opinion, are Xavi and Wesley Sneijder."

"You're really making my head hurt," Tim said. "Plus nobody said nothing about going back in time or—what's that called? —*history*."

"You know though," Nuno said. "It's hard to argue with him."

"Okay," Tim said. "Let's not argue with him then. Let's just kick his know-it-all little __"

"You know, speaking of history," Poindexter said. "Did you know the first soccer balls were made out of human heads?"

Tim glared at him and started to get up.

Knowing he was in for it, Poindexter took off running toward the far end of the

deserted field. The three boys began chasing after him.

"Come back here, you little turd!" Clive called. "You know you've got it coming to you."

Poindexter wasn't a very good soccer player, but he was fast. The pursuers gave up by the time they reached the center circle. To be on the safe side, Poindexter didn't stop until he got behind the other goal.

Suddenly a man dressed in a three-piece suit stepped out of the bushes and walked up to him. Poindexter stared up at the man. His suit was covered in dry, caked mud. His face was a pale purple color. There was a sutured scar circling his head.

Then as the three boys looked on in horror, the man grabbed Poindexter's head and ripped it off his shoulders!

A great geyser of blood shot from his neck into the air. Poindexter's body stumbled around for a few seconds before collapsing.

"I can't believe my eyes," Tim said, breathing hard. "That guy just tore off Poindexter's head!"

"Let's call the cops," Nuno said turning in the direction of his soccer bag. "I'll get my phone."

The other two followed him but then they all stopped.

Other dead-looking people started stumbling toward them from all directions.

The three boys tried to escape but it was no use. They too ended up like Poindexter.

"Me like Ronaldo," one of the zombies said a few minutes later with food in her mouth. "He pretty."

"Clint Dempsey, he more pretty," another said getting mad. "Hollow eyes make my knee wobble and go all lucy goosey."

"Ronal-din-ho," the three-piece-suited zombie said, dribbling Nuno's head slowly in a large circle. "Dinho, he still the best."

Sins of a Saturday Afternoon

"Can you confess something you haven't done yet, father?" the voice on the other side of the partition said.

"Let's stick with what you *have* done," Father O'Brien sighed. "Plus you have free will, my son. You don't have to do whatever it is you haven't done yet."

"I don't mean to tell you your business," the voice said. "But I think you're wrong."

"What do you mean?" the priest said.

Saturday confession always brought in the loons.

“Well, padre, in the first place it’ll be too late to confess it later,” the voice said, sounding different. “And second, you’re wrong about free—”

“Wait, my son. What do you mean it will be too late to confess it later?”

“It’ll be too late,” the voice hissed, “because you’ll be *dead*.”

Father O’Brien suddenly felt the entire confessional shake. Then he heard the wood splintering. He didn’t even have time to say a pra—AAAAH!!!

What's the Matter, Sweetie?

The room was entombed in darkness. A total absence of light sucked the life out of the world. A blackness darker than death. And then something began to glow. Ever so slowly. Faintly. But growing in intensity with each passing second.

Details came into focus. Features revealed themselves one by one.

It was a face.

And it became clear that that glow, almost neon vomit green, still faint, was coming from inside the head itself. The

corners of the mouth turned upward in a twisted, macabre imitation of a smile. The eyes burned bright now. A hellish brightness that could only come from one place. It came closer and closer and closer and…

Aaah! Aaaaah!

Rupert woke up to the sounds of his own screams.

He ran down the hall, crying and gasping for breath. He was drowning in his own fear. *Breathe*, he told himself. *Breathe!*

So hideous. So horrible. And yet… there was something vaguely and hauntingly familiar about it. *Must breathe.*

Twelve now. Breathe. Too old for this…

He burst through his mother's bedroom door.

“What’s the matter, sweetie?” his mother whispered, running her fingers through his hair. “Did you have a nightmare?”

She hadn’t called him *sweetie* in years.

Rupert could only gasp and shiver in her arms.

“You know what grand dad used to tell me when I had a bad dream?”

“Wha-wha-what?” Rupert whimpered.

“He would say that nightmares are one of the best things in the world because you wake up and you see that they’re not real. That everything’s fine.”

She kissed Rupert softly on the forehead.

She was right, he thought. *I’m being a baby. Everything is fine.*

He started to calm down.

Suddenly the room became cold. Icy cold. He could see his breath.

Rupert began shivering again and looked down at his shaking hands. They were green —neon vomit green.

The fear returning, he looked up at his mom's face.

It was glowing. The corners of her mouth turned upward in a twisted, macabre imitation of a smile. Her eyes burned bright. Green and bright. It was that face, the same face he had seen in the nightmare.

The face of—

Rupert broke free and stumbled out of the room.

"What's the matter, sweetie?" a voice called from behind and then laughed.

It no longer sounded like his mother.

“What’s the matter, sweetie?”

Running down the dark hall, Rupert looked back over his shoulder. There was nothing there.

There was nothing there.

There was nothing there.

But there was something, something green and unspeakably evil, waiting for him in—AAAAH!!!

Broken

The TV was their lives. One day it broke. They dug a hole in the backyard. And jumped in.

Bad Memory

Something woke George in the middle of the night.

Something was scratching at the window.

He got up slowly and stumbled toward it, almost tripping over the empty whiskey bottle on the floor.

It was his wife.

“Sarah, what are you doing out there at this time of night?” he said. “Did you forget your key?”

“I’ve come back, George,” she said, sounding a little strange.

George wondered if he was dreaming. What was Sarah doing out there? Starting to wake up, George realized that their bedroom was on the second story and that there was no ledge outside the window. How could Sarah be stan—

“I’ve come back for you, George,” she said, the skin falling off her face. “Now we can always be together.”

George suddenly remembered that he had buried Sarah that morning. *After he had killed her.*

“I don’t understand how I got there,” she said. “But I was in the ground. It was dark and cold. But I found my way back, George.”

She smiled as best she could through her smashed and sunken face.

“I came back for you, George.”

George screamed and *ran* out the window. And fell on the hard brick patio below.

“Let’s go home, George,” Sarah said next to his dead body. “Let’s go home.”

Trail Thing

It came to be known that the trail leading into the Cherokee village was haunted. A thing would steal and eat the liver of travelers upon the path.

The village lived in fear. The chief called the great council together. There was talking and talking. Nothing was decided.

“I will walk this trail,” Fears No Man finally said. “I am not afraid. I will bring back the monster’s head.”

The next day Fears No Man was walking upon the trail. He saw an old woman up in the distance.

"You should not be on this road, grandmother," the warrior said when he caught up to her. "There is a monster about."

"So I have heard," the old woman said. "But now that you are here, I am unafraid."

Fears No Man and the old woman walked the trail for a time. The shadows grew.

The old woman began to hum a song.

"What is that you sing, grandmother?" the warrior asked. "I have never heard that song."

"It is my own," the old woman said. "I will teach it to you."

"When my belly growls I do not quiver," she sang. *"When my belly growls I feed it liver. When my belly growls I feed it liver."*

Fears No Man stopped and turned to face the old woman.

Her face changed and became hard as a rock. Then she began to laugh through black, rotten teeth.

"When my belly growls I feed it liver."

Afraid for the first time in his life, Fears No Man staggered back.

"It's *you*," he said, his voice shaky. "You are the liver stealer that haunts this trail."

The old woman did not answer. She just kept laughing.

The warrior quickly shot the thing full of arrows. But they all bounced off as if her skin was made of stone.

The old woman kept laughing.

Forgetting his promise, Fears No Man took off running down the trail.

But he soon became tired. Very tired. He started walking and then shuffling and after a time was too weak to even crawl. He sat down by the side of the trail with his back to a rock.

The liver witch might be just around the bend, coming after him, but Fears No Man was too tired to care. He just sat there. His eyes grew heavy.

A short time later, he heard someone coming down the trail in the opposite direction.

“The Great Spirit has sent help,” Fears No Man sighed.

It was a young woman. When she came closer, the weary warrior could see that she was beautiful.

“Help me,” he whispered. “We must hurry and leave this place.”

“What is the hurry?” the young woman said.

As the setting sun shone upon her face, Fears No Man could now see that her mouth and chin were covered with blood.

“What has happened to you?” he asked.

The young woman smiled through black, rotten teeth.

At that moment Fears No Man suddenly understood why he had lost all his energy. He reached down and felt around. There was

no blood, no slash across his midsection. But *it* was missing just the same.

"What have you done to *me*?" Fears No Man gasped, horror-struck.

The young woman began to sing.

"When my belly growls I do not quiver. When my belly growls I feed it liver. When my belly growls I feed it liver.

[If possible, grab someone's gut as you shout...]

"*Your* LIV-AAAAH!!!"

Stone Lover

The lonely girl was too smart to believe that her Prince Charming would one day come and take her away. And even if such things happened, she knew it would never happen to her.

She needed to take things into her own hands. So one day she checked out a book of spells from the library.

She found the right one and followed the instructions.

“Give it a name and place its image in the circle of candles,” the book read. “Close

your eyes and repeat ‘Eye of newt, horn of toad, unfathomable lyric of Stevie Nicks, bring him to me, bring him to me now.’ Do this nine times.”

The girl put the postcard of David she had brought back from Italy inside the circle of candles.

She closed her eyes and began chanting.

“Eye of newt, horn of toad, unfathomable lyric of Stevie Nicks, bring him to me, bring him to me now. Eye of newt, horn of toad, unfathomable lyric of Stevie Nicks, bring him to me, bring him to me now…”

A moment after she had finished, there was a loud knock at the door.

The girl got up and looked out the peephole. She couldn’t believe it.

“It can’t be,” she whispered. “It worked. It worked.”

She threw open the door and standing there in front of her was David. The statue had come to life. It had come to life!

His white skin had a marble paleness that lit up the room. He smiled and waited.

“Come in,” the girl said.

David stepped inside and gently took her hand. Tears flew from her eyes as he crushed the bones in her fingers. He leaned in to kiss her. He knocked out some of her bottom teeth with his tongue.

She reached for the book of spells with her good hand.

“Antidote,” she mumbled, drooling teeth and blood. “Antidote. Must… find… antidote…”

As she flipped desperately through the book, David closed in for a hug.

Squeamish Teacher

“I don’t think children this age should hear vampire stories,” the teacher said.

“I think you’re right,” the author said. “Guess we won’t tell them what happened to you.”

“What do you me—” the teacher began to say but never finished.

The author interrupted him. *With his fangs*.

Tumama is Ugly

Who is the scariest clown in the world?

It's impossible to measure such things. It's a very personal thing. Everyone's got their favorite.

That being said, it would be hard to find a scarier clown than Tumama.

Tumama was so scary that she had been fired from countless circuses and carnivals for being so ugly. She was so scary looking that people of all ages would just start running away at the mere sight of her shadow or the mention of her name.

Then one day when Tumama was about to give up being a clown, she got a job at a special circus for the blind. People couldn't see her, so there was no problem. Everyone loved Tumama. For the first time in her life, Tumama was happy.

But then something happened. A doctor came to the circus and checked everyone's vision.

"Tumama needs glasses," the doctor said to Tumama. "Just wait till you see what you've been missing."

Tumama picked out some big red frames.

The following week, her glasses arrived.

Wow! This was amazing! The doctor was right. Everything was so clear and in focus.

And then Tumama looked in the mirror.

She let out a terrible scream.

Tumama had never seen herself before. Not so clearly and so in focus. For the first and last time she saw what everyone else saw.

Tumama dropped dead on the spot.

Look Away

The old high school at the edge of town was a disaster. The teachers were fine, and the kids were okay, but the two story-building itself was a mess. It was ancient, with plenty of peeling paint and wobbly floors. And because times were hard in the little Alabama town, there was never any money to fix anything.

Since they had shut down the coal mine a few years back, a lot of people packed up and went to the city. So there weren't so many students in the school anymore. In

fact, the entire upstairs was closed off and used for storage. No one was allowed to go up there anymore.

One day, during history, the ceiling started squeaking and everyone looked up. It sounded like someone was walking up there, pacing back and forth, back and forth.

"Relax, students," Mrs. DuBois told the class. "Probably just the janitor getting something."

Everyone went back to work.

But every day for the next week, during their lessons on the Civil War, strange noises kept coming from upstairs. There was walking and pounding and things falling. Sometimes there was a dragging sound across the length of the ceiling. Even though Mrs. DuBois had called the office to report

what was going on, the secretary always called back and told her that the janitor found nothing up there.

"It's the ghost of Corporal Smith!" shouted Bobby McGraw one day.

The class laughed nervously, but soon Bobby's idea took hold. The kids started believing that it was the ghost of the long dead corporal, who had died in a Civil War battle not far from where the school was built.

Bobby told Shane that he was going upstairs to confront the ghost and invited him along.

"We'll sneak up after school, when the school's cleared out. See what's going on," Bobby said.

At the end of day, the boys ran up the stairs. It was pitch black and they had no flashlights. All Shane could do was follow Bobby's whisper.

"See anything?" Shane asked.

"Not yet," Bobby said.

Suddenly, both boys saw the small light at the end of the long hall. They walked toward it.

"What the heck? It's a campfire," Bobby whispered. "And smells like one too. And listen. Do you hear all those voices?"

Shane did hear the voices and did smell the fire. And suddenly he saw a large silhouette heading right towards them.

"Let's get outta here," Bobby whispered. But his mouth was so dry, Shane couldn't even hear any of his words.

Then a man's voice screamed at them.

"Looky what we got here!" he said. "Reinforcements! Two young men, all ready to enlist and fight the good fight, help us win this war! Welcome to the Confederate Army, fellas!"

The man laughed a terrible laugh that pounded in the boys' brain. They tried to run, but a group of men held them down and started dragging them over to the fire. In the next moment they were out in a foggy field, with terrible gunfire all around and the smell of death thick in their nostrils.

Back in town, everybody was talking about the disappearance of Bobby McGraw and Shane McElroy from school the previous week. Police had searched the school, woods, and the entire town with no

luck. But some students reported that they had seen the two catching a train headed for the big city. That's what the boys always talked about. The police concluded that they must have just left.

"Kind of weird they'd just pick up and leave like that," Mrs. DuBois said in class one day. "Those boys' families have been in this county for over one hundred fifty years. Why, some of their relatives fought in the Civil War."

"Oh, that's what it is, relatives," Wade Jenkins said. "Freaked me out last night. I was looking at that picture of the Confederate Army in our history book. Two of those fellas look exactly like Bobby and Shane. But it must have been their kin."

‘Em

“What were you thinking out there?” the coach screamed.

Donavan just tilted his head to the side, like a dog trying to understand human speech. Then he smiled.

“Brains,” he said.

“What?” the coach shouted.

“Brains,” Donavan repeated and shuffled closer.

“Exactly,” the coach said, shaking his head. “Use ‘em or lose ‘em.”

Then Donavan bit off a big chunk of the coach's head.

"Or eat 'emmm."

17 Miles

The phone rang. It was Jim's father.

"I've skidded off the road," he said. "I'm about 17 miles—"

The line went dead.

Jim called back several times but there was no answer.

And then he woke up. The dream seemed so real. It took a few moments for it to dawn on Jim that his father had died of cancer four years earlier.

Jim lay in bed, remembering his father and trying to make some sense of the dream. Did it mean something? Was his father

trying to tell him something? Could it be some kind of warning?

Jim wasn't the superstitious kind, but since he didn't remember his dreams very often, he couldn't help but think there was a hidden meaning to them.

He couldn't get back to sleep and spent the whole day thinking about the dream.

"Skidded off the road… 17 miles… 17 miles…" he kept repeating.

Jim never found out what the dream meant.

He was grilling some steaks on the barbecue and…

He suddenly woke up.

"Man, I had another one of those nightmares," he said.

“The one where you’re still alive?” his dad asked.

“Yeah,” Jim shuddered. *“Scary.”*

Evil

It was a dark and stormy night. Very dark. And very stormy. There was something outside. Something evil. No, not *something* evil. It was evil itself. Just sitting there. Waiting in the rain, getting all wet.

"The hell with this," the evil said in a ghastly voice dripping with rainwater and death. "I'm going inside."

It took a step toward the house.

The family ran out the backdoor. The house would have left too, if only it could. A moment later the evil blew right in through

the locked and frightened door. It filled the house from the basement to the attic and back down again. The house trembled something awful.

After a while the evil toweled off, got bored, and left.

It was last seen heading this way.

Aaaaah!

Home Early

Brenda Brown came home early.

She baked a cherry pie for her husband, Bob.

Since Bob usually beat Brenda home, he was surprised to see her.

“Got off early, huh?” he said.

“Yeah,” Brenda said. “I baked your favorite.”

Bob could smell the pie, fresh out of the oven, even before he saw it sitting on the counter.

“Works for me,” he said and smiled.

He saw that the answering machine was blinking. He began to play back the messages.

"Mr. Brown, this is Principal Lawrence at Sunset Elementary," the voice said. "I'm calling because Brenda never—"

Just then the doorbell rang.

Bob opened the door.

It was the police.

"Mr. Brown?" one of the officers said. "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you."

"What is it?" Bob said.

"I'm sorry," the other officer said. "But your wife was killed at the train station this morning. She somehow fell from the platform and into the path of an oncoming train."

“There must be a mistake,” Bob said. “My wife’s right here.”

Bob Brown searched and searched the house but found no trace of Brenda—except for the cherry pie, still hot and steaming.

Her body had been down at the morgue all day.

Pumpkins on the Porch

The pumpkins sat on the porch. The old man and the old woman sat on the porch too. It was warm for late October. Downright hot.

The pumpkins were beginning to rot in the heat. The old couple was beginning to smell bad too.

By early November the weather had cooled. But by then it was too late. The pumpkins had long since turned black and moldy. And the old man and old woman had turned orange. Long creases covered their faces. Stems grew from their heads. They

just sat there, not moving, and watched the dead leaves blow down the street through their triangle eyes. They smiled their jagged smiles and spit out their seeds and waited for what would happen next.

A Hopeless Case

He began screaming. Nothing could save him.

AAAH!

AAAAH!!

AAAAAH!!!

The Head

The toilet started gurgling.

Great big bubbles rose to the surface. For a moment everything was quiet. Then an eyeball silently pressed up against the small opening at the bottom. And then the entire porcelain structure began to shake furiously.

Something was making its way up.

After more shaking, a small bloody head pushed its way up, up, up, and finally free. It floated at the top. Then it opened its mouth and started singing soft and low.

"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen."

The sound of its voice was almost beautiful.

Almost.

A hand reached out and flushed the toilet.

Rodeo Clowns

Waylon and Big Ed were rodeo clowns.

Big Ed was a short fella with a short temper. On accounts of being so little and all, I reckon Big Ed felt he had to be tougher n' meaner than everyone else.

One day he decides for no good reason that he didn't like Waylon. Waylon was a good-natured, gangly cowpoke who towered about two feet over the top of Big Ed's head. But that didn't matter.

"What you lookin' at, big dumb clown?" Big Ed says to Waylon one day.

I don’t think Waylon was even looking at him. But that didn’t matter. From that moment on, he went after Waylon. At first it was just name callin’ and such.

But one day, Big Ed went too far.

Right before the rodeo was set to start, he put something in Waylon’s milk. He thought it would be funny to see Waylon stagger around like he was drunk. Especially since Waylon didn’t drink.

When Waylon got out there, he was a real mess, wobbly as a newborn calf and trippin’ all over hisself.

The crowd was really into it, thinkin’ it was part of his act. But some of the older clowns knew it was dangerous. One of them even tried to go out and bring Waylon in, but Big Ed held him back.

“Get back, old timer,” Big Ed said. “Don’t try to spoil my fun now.”

Next thing we know, a bull is charging Waylon.

He never had a chance.

There’s nothing sadder ‘n a clown funeral. I tell you what. ‘Cept maybe a clown funeral in the rain.

The authorities never found any real evidence that Big Ed had done nothing wrong, so Waylon’s death went into the books as an accident.

I don’t think Big Ed ever felt guilty about it neithers. Wasn’t made that way. But he did begin acting kind of peculiar. Started talking to hisself. He would look up and say things like, “Now I know you’re not real, so just git!” like he was talkin’ to someone.

Then one day about a year after, it was, it's Big Ed's turn to go distract the bull and suddenly his eyes 'bout pop out of his head and he starts pointin' and screamin', "No, Waylon, No! No, Waylon, No!"

There was no one there. But Big Ed saw something just the same. And the bull saw and smelled something too. Fear. He grunted and charged.

Big Ed never even tried to get out of the way. He just stood there looking up and screaming.

"No, Waylon, No! No, Waylon, No!"

The bull's left horn ripped into Big Ed's chest. He lifted him high up in the air. Big Ed didn't even seem to care. He just kept screaming, "No, Waylon, No!"

Big Ed died long before reachin' the hospital.

Things got even stranger when it was discovered that some vandals had desecrated Waylon's grave that night. The soil was all turned over. And then the cemetery caretaker noticed that down in the hole the coffin was all splintered to pieces and the body was gone. What those no good varmints would want the body of a dead clown for I could not say.

All I can tell you is that Waylon was never seen again.

Of course, some of the folks who were there at the rodeo that night think that isn't exactly true.

Some even say you can still hear Big Ed's screams if you listen carefully on

nights when the moon is full and the crickets are all chirped out and the midnight train has rolled over them thar hills and the—
AAAAAH!!!

Hold the Pepperoni:
The Prequel, Part Two

"Are you pigs lost?" the shepherd said looking down. "Don't you have a house to buil—"

He suddenly felt something strange blow through him. He was rocked again a second time. And a third.

The three pigs, their eyes now bulging with confusion and terror, ran snorting and grunting and oinking in great distress toward the rest of the herd.

Inside the shepherd an argument broke out.

“What in Hades are you two doing in here?” the first demon said.

“I’m tired of you always acting like you’re the boss of me,” the second said.

“Yeah,” the third said. “Anyway, like you said, this could be some ‘serious fun’ times three.”

“I suppose,” the first one said.

“Darn right,” said the second. “You make this guy dance while I have him speak in a language he doesn’t know.”

“What should I do?” the third one said.

“How ‘bout you make his eyes spin and go all white?” the first demon said. “That’s always a crowd pleaser.”

Menu

Tom was lost out in the woods of Northern Canada. It was getting dark and cold and he didn't know where he was or how to get back to his car.

The shadows closed in all around. He started to get really worried. And then he smelled something.

It smelled wonderful. Some sort of meat cooking.

Soon his nose led him to an old cabin. There was a light on in the window.

Tom decided to ask for help. He knocked on the door.

An old man answered.

“Howdy, young feller,” the man said. “Name’s Dan. Friends call me Ol’ Dan on account I’m no spring chicken and on account my name’s Dan.”

“Hi,” Tom said. “I’m Tom. I wonder if you could help me. I’m afraid I’m lost.”

“Oh, no,” Ol’ Dan said. “You’ve come to the right place. And just at the right time too. You’re just in time for supper.”

Tom stepped inside the small cabin and sat at the table.

“It’ll just be a minute now,” Ol’ Dan said as he scratched something onto a little chalkboard. “I tend to forget things if I don’t

write ‘em down. I was updatin’ tomorrow’s menu.”

“This is delicious,” Tom said after the first spoonful.

The meat was tender, like it had been stewing all day in the large pot.

“What is this, deer meat?” Tom asked.

You might say that,” Ol’ Dan said and winked.

Just then Tom noticed that there was something among the potatoes, the carrots, the lentils, and the meat. It was looking up at him. It looked like a—

“DEAR GOD, that’s a human eyeball!” Tom shouted.

“See what I mean?” Ol’ Dan said. “I call this here *dear* meat on account of folks

always carryin' on about 'Dear me' or 'oh, my dear' or, as in your case, 'Dear God.'"

Tom dropped his spoon.

"Better dig in, boy," the old man said. "On account of this being your last meal and all."

Tom sat perfectly still for a moment. Then he got up and ran toward the door. But Ol' Dan stuck out a foot, sending Tom flying across the floor. He landed near the large stew pot hanging in the fireplace.

Right before something sharp sliced into the side of his head, Tom managed to read what was written on the little chalkboard: *Biscuits with Homemade Tom Turkey Gravy.*

Bandoneón

The call came in on the shortwave radio and confirmed their worst fear: the storm that had lasted for six days would now maroon them here for much longer.

Dr. Mary St. Clair and Dr. Paul St. Clair had been packed and all ready to go. But the husband and wife science team would be going nowhere. It was now too dangerous for a plane to come for them until the spring. They would be spending the entire winter in Antarctica.

Just last week the planes had come and gone, flying tons of gear and hundreds of people back to civilization. Back to the sun.

"Well, at least we've got plenty of food and fuel," Paul said. "And the flat screen and all those DVDs should help pass some of the time."

"Too bad our books and my sheet music were already shipped out," Mary said. "But this might give me a chance to write my own tangos."

Paul had bought her a small hand-held accordion called a *bandoneón* in Argentina on their last stop before flying down to their South Pole home. He thought learning how to play a new instrument would help to fill the long Antarctic hours. Mary had become

a pretty good player in the five months they had been at the ice station.

"Maybe you can teach me how to dance," Paul said, trying to sound optimistic. "Plus maybe I'll write that novel I'm always talking about."

At first the couple made the best of the situation. They watched movies, Mary played her music, and Paul wrote.

But in under a month the TV broke and Paul developed writer's block.

Mary kept playing though. She had even written a tango she called "Pablo's Peace."

Paul liked it at first and was touched that Mary would name her first composition in his honor.

But as the weeks went by, Mary became more and more obsessed with the song. Soon it was all she would play.

Through the endless dark days and dark nights that bled into one another, *Pablo's Peace* began to wear on Paul.

"Mary, could you please play something else?" he would ask and then beg and then scream. "Please, Mary. For the love of God. *Please*."

But the answer was always the same.

"I'm almost finished with it, dear. It'll be worth it."

Mary stopped cooking and bathing and sleeping. Her entire existence revolved around *Pablo's Peace*.

"For the love of God, Mary. Please stop, please," Paul would say. "Please."

“I’m almost finished with it, dear,” she would answer. “It’ll be worth it.”

***

When the other scientists returned to the ice station in the spring they found Paul first.

He had killed himself with an axe.

Then they found Mary. In the freezer. She had been hacked to pieces and neatly wrapped and stored.

They also found a note.

I know you won’t understand, but I had to do it. She drove me mad. With that song. That infernal song. The funny thing is that I can hear it still. Even though I made her stop yesterday. Or was it last week? It doesn’t matter. I made her stop. That’s the

point. Or if you're going to nitpick, all right, the axe made her stop. But I helped. And when we were through with dear, dear Mary —the axe and I—we made that bandoneón stop. Oh, we made it stop. That damned bandoneón will never play another note again. We saw to that. God will understand. He knows about such things.

Dr. Paul St. Clair

"Man, that poor bastard really went nuts out here," the detective called in to investigate the case said. "But I guess music will get on your nerves that way I suppose."

"To my way of thinking that's a scientific fact," the ice station manager said. "And you could almost understand where he

was coming from, except for one small detail."

"What's that?" the detective said.

"Along with the rest of their personal belongings, that accordion he writes about was flown out on the last plane that left here back in March—*five months ago*."

There Was Something
at the Top of the Stairs

There was something at the top of the stairs.

There was something at the top of the stairs.

There was something at the top of the…

AAAAH!!!

A Knock at the Door

There was a knock at the door.

Old Ned peeked out through the window.

"It's Death," he told Old Jed. "Don't answer it."

Old Jed nodded.

There was another knock.

"You can't hide from me forever, ya *bassturds*," Death said. "I'll be back."

Several years went by.

Then one day Old Ned got real sick.

"I think this is it," he said to Old Jed.

There was a knock at the door.

“I think you’re right,” Old Jed said.

“Don’t answer it just in case,” Old Ned said.

“Got ya,” Old Jed said.

But it wasn’t Old Jed anymore. When Old Ned looked up at Old Jed’s face, he saw a skull.

Old Ned suddenly remembered that Old Jed had died last year.

“You found me at last,” Old Ned said to Death. “Well at least I’ll get to see Old Jed again at the graveyard.”

“I wouldn’t count on it, ya *basstur*d,” Death said.

There was another knock at the door.

“Who’s that?” Old Ned said with his last dying breath.

“It’s Red the Undertaker,” Death said. “He’s here to drive your body to the morgue. But he’ll fail to negotiate a sharp turn and go off a cliff. There shouldn’t be enough left of either one of ya to bury.”

The Possibilities

"Man, these little punks are so freakin' lucky," Eddie said shaking his head. "Can you imagine if our elementary school had been next to a cemetery?"

"Yeah, I guess that would be kinda cool," Max said. "But being in middle school is still better."

"What's wrong with you, man?" Eddie said. "Can't you see the possibilities?"

"Guess not," Max said.

The two boys were quiet again as they waited for their younger sisters. They stared

at the new school and the old graveyard just on the other side of the playground.

The bell rang and kids came pouring out the front doors.

“You meet me back here tonight and I’ll show you the possibilities,” Eddie said. “And bring a shovel.”

“A shovel?” Max said. “That sounds uncool.”

“Just do it, female,” Eddie said.

“All right,” Max sighed. “What time?”

“Let’s say 9:00,” Eddie said.

Max bit his lip and nodded slowly.

***

They had been digging in the dark for 20 minutes.

“Why are we doing this again?” Max said, breathing hard.

“Because it’s here, man,” Eddie said. “We’re just looking for a chance to relive what we missed out on.”

“That doesn’t even make any sen—” Max didn’t finish.

Suddenly dirt had started flying up from under their feet.

Then a gray, bony hand reached up and grabbed Eddie by the ankle.

“I like your thinking, boy,” the corpse said, standing up. “Especially the part about re-*living*.”

Max pulled himself out of the grave and ran off screaming.

“Help me, man!” Eddie called after him in vain. “Help!”

The *thing* still held on tight to him.

“I’m sure you don’t mind if I borrow your body for a while,” it said in a gurgling voice. “Don’t wait up for me.”

Eddie dropped dead into the hole. Then *he* got up and started—

AAAAH!!!

Old Fears

Rachel had always been afraid to flush the toilet.

At first her parents thought it was cute. Later her sister would take turns making fun of her and being disgusted.

When she was younger, Rachel couldn't wrap her mind around it or put it into words. She just knew there was something scary, lurking there in deep down in the water.

But as she got older, Rachel began to spend more and more time thinking about what it was that frightened her so. And the

more she thought about it, the more her fear seemed to vanish.

By the time she was 15, her phobia had become something that belonged to her past. A funny, dark secret and nothing more.

But then one day Rachel was visiting a friend and had to use the bathroom. Suddenly the room was filled with the smell of terror. Then she heard a voice coming from somewhere below her.

“I’m the thing,” it said. “The thing you feared all those years. You were right to be afraid.”

Rachel felt herself being pulled down, down, down beneath the water, beneath the light. Beneath, beneath, beneath…

Parasight

Strange looking little creatures had begun to take over the aquarium.

Besides their odd shaped heads, they seemed harmless enough. But to be on the safe side, Rosa decided to give the tank a thorough cleaning. Wouldn’t want some parasite to wipe out her pets. She safely removed the tropical fish and got down to it.

As she was finishing, water splashed in her eye.

It immediately began to burn.

Rosa stumbled to the bathroom and rinsed the eye with fresh water. The eye was sore and red and swollen.

She quickly finished putting the aquarium back together and went to lie down. At some point she fell asleep.

When Rosa woke up, her eye felt better. But as she got up she almost lost her balance and fell down. Half the room looked freakishly large. She looked in the mirror and saw that her left eye was no longer red or swollen. In fact it almost seemed smaller than its original size. And it had changed color or rather lost color and looked faded, almost transparent.

Rosa felt terribly thirty, as if she had taken a nap in the Sahara. She went to the kitchen and poured herself a large glass of

water and stopped. She suddenly reached for the salt container and poured half of it in her glass. Then she gulped it down.

"Ahhh," she said. "That's better."

She went to look at the aquarium.

"Por el amor de Dios," Rosa said.

The creatures were still there.

As she took a closer look, Rosa got dizzy. Her head felt strange. There was something wrong with her eyes. Her left eye had become like some sort of microscope. Everything she saw out of it was huge. The little things in the fish tank were as big as she was.

Rosa staggered back to the bathroom.

She screamed when she looked in the mirror. The entire left side of her face was now transparent!

She screamed again and fainted.

When she regained consciousness, she felt better. She wasn't dizzy anymore. Everything seemed to be the right size—even the giant shrimp head looking back at her from the mirror.

The Fax Machine

The fax machine beeped.

Something was coming in.

The machine started to make a terrible noise. The jammed paper caught on fire. Smoke poured out.

And yet something was coming in.

Something—not paper, not flat—dropped onto the desk.

It was a hairy hand.

It scurried behind the computer monitor and waited.

Then the phone rang.

Teddy Bear

Elsa's dad worked in the customer service department of a large store. Sometimes he got to bring home things that had been returned and could not be resold. Sometimes the items were broken—her dad was good at fixing things. Other times the things had slight imperfections but still worked.

"This teddy bear's got a bit of a problem," he said one day. "He doesn't seem to have a face. I thought maybe you could sew one on for it."

“All right,” Elsa said. “I’ll see what I can do.”

She took the large bear into her room.

That night Elsa had a series of terrible nightmares. Each one was more horrifying than the last. She finally woke up screaming.

Except that she couldn’t hear herself scream. She couldn’t see anything in the dark, so she reached over and clumsily knocked the lamp over onto the floor.

She then reached up to her face with thumbless, mitten-like hands. She couldn’t feel any skin. Just matted stuffed animal fur. She didn’t have any features either. No eyes, no mouth, no nose, no ears!

Elsa tried to scream again. And again. And again.

It was no use. She couldn’t hear a thing. The shouts were all trapped inside her head. And she couldn’t see.

She couldn’t see that there was a new doll in the room, where the Teddy Bear had been.

It looked just like Elsa. Except it wasn’t Elsa. And it wasn’t a doll.

Nine

The old van parked across from the school. Nine clowns got out.

The old van parked across from the school. Nine clowns got out.

The old van parked across from the school. Nine clowns got out.

[Encourage audience to chant along.]

The old van parked across from the school. Nine clowns got out.

The old van parked across from the school. Nine clowns got out.

The old van parked across from the school. Nine clowns got out.

[Ask listeners to close their eyes now and to keep chanting. Don't worry if some don't. They'll get theirs.]

The old van parked across from the school. Nine clowns got out.

The old van parked across from the school. Nine clowns got out.

The old van parked across from the school. Nine clowns got… AAAAAH!!!

You're It (No, Really)

"Dad," Jeanne yelled. "Mr. Fluff Butt caught another one!"

There it was, curled up and dead, at the top of the stairs leading down to the garage.

Jeanne's dad got some paper towels and picked it up.

A moment later Mr. Fluff Butt came shooting up the steps. He bounced off the wall and out of sight.

"Wow, look at those eyes," the dad said, holding up the dead mouse. "They're so red."

“That’s gross!” she said.

It had to be the creepiest mouse Jeanne had ever seen. But the next thing that happened was even creepier.

The mouse suddenly started moving and its dead eyes came to life. It broke free and ran down the stairs.

“Looks like Mr. Fluff Butt needs a little work on his *coup de grâce* technique,” Jeanne’s dad said. “Oh, well, our brave hunter deserves an extra helping of wet food tonight anyway.”

But Mr. Fluff Butt didn’t show up for dinner that night. Or the night after that. Jeanne searched everywhere for the fat gray cat but couldn’t find him.

“What if he got hit by a car or something?” she said, breaking down on the third night.

“Don’t you worry,” her mom said, sounding worried. “He’ll turn up.”

Sure enough, the next morning Jeanne woke up and found Mr. Fluff Butt at the foot of her bed.

“Mr. Fluff Butt!” she yelled, hugging him tightly. “Where have you been, kitty?”

The cat purred loudly as Jeanne kissed his soft and fluffy head.

Then, out of nowhere, came the flash of Mr. Fluff Butt’s claws.

He dug into Jeanne’s face. Mr. Fluff Butt held on to her cheek like some sort of possessed rodeo rider. She finally managed to throw the crazed cat across the bedroom.

He raised his back and hissed.

Through her tears, Jeanne could see that Mr. Fluff Butt's eyes were different. They weren't green anymore. They had turned a sickly shade of red. She had seen those eyes somewhere before.

Jeanne mom's heard the screams and came running. She disinfected the nasty looking scratch and tried to make some sense of what had happened.

"Cats will be cats," she said, shaking her head.

Jeanne had trouble sleeping that night. The scratch hurt and she had nightmares. About the mouse with the red eyes. About Mr. Fluff Butt. About blood.

In the morning she almost screamed when she looked at her face in the mirror.

The area around the scratch was swollen and pink. “Geez, Frankenstein,” her dad said when he saw her. “That doesn’t look so good.”

He was trying to be funny, but he sounded worried. He placed a hand on Jeanne’s forehead.

“I think we better take you in,” he said.

On the way to the hospital, Jeanne felt parts of her head grow numb. When they walked in, she couldn’t help but notice the look of terror on the nurse’s face. She led Jeanne and her parents to an exam room.

“The doctor will be right in,” she said, looking away. “I’ll make sure you get top priority.”

Jeanne’s parents looked at each other. They couldn’t hide the concern in their eyes.

At some point, everything went black.

When Jeanne came to, she felt different.

Everything was different now.

“Oh, my God,” Jeanne’s mom cried. “Look at her eyes?”

Her parents stood over her, their faces frozen in fear.

When the doctor came in, all she could see was the pale pulsing pink flesh. A hunger burned in her stomach. She grabbed his arm and dug in. He let out a shriek and tried to pull away.

But Jeanne was too strong.

Going My Way

It felt like he had been going around in circles for a long time. Everything looked the same. Trees. Trees of all sizes. Trees. Trees in every direction.

The hike had started out well enough. It was beautiful in the forest. And then Virgil had decided to go off trail. To test his navigation skills. His map skills.

It turned out he didn't have any.

At least that's how he felt now. He had tried in vain to find the trail again. That was hours ago.

And then a sound. A grunt? A growl? He turned around and saw it. A bear. Sniffing the air. Heading toward him. Virgil dropped the map and compass and took off running. His daypack bouncing off his back, he ran and ran and ran. His chest had to be one more breath away from exploding, but he ran some more.

He didn't see the tree snag that tore into his shin. Virgil went flying. Crying out in pain, he looked behind him. Nothing but trees.

He wondered if there ever had been a bear. Maybe he had imagined it.

He crawled over to a tree trunk and sat up against it. He looked at his leg. It didn't seem to be broken, but it hurt terribly.

Still breathing hard, Virgil reached for his water bottle. That's when he saw it.

A few feet away, propped up against a nearby tree, was a body.

It looked to be a teenager, about his age. It looked like he had been out here for a long time. The rotting flesh was dropping from its face. Bones were poking through in places. Hollow eyes looking through him.

As Virgil stared on in horror, he noticed how much the boy looked like him.

He had the same haircut. The same clothes. The same baseball cap. The same Sunridge Middle School water bottle. Except for the horrid decomposition, it was like looking in the mirror.

And then it hit him like a chainsaw. The boy didn't just look like him. *It was him*.

Virgil was seeing himself. He was dead. He had died out here. He had gotten lost and died. His ghost must have been roaming these woods for days and weeks. Maybe months. And now it had come back to its body.

He was dead!

Virgil hung his head to his chest and cried.

And then the corpse began to speak.

“You will end up like me one day,” it said. “But not yet.”

When Virgil looked up, the boy’s bony index finger was pointing.

“Go that way.”

Virgil wiped away his tears and stood up. He started walking. Somehow, his leg had stopped hurting, and he was now sure

that he would find the trail and make it out all right.

When he turned around, the corpse was gone.

It's All Right, Jerry…
That's All Right, Mama

Jerry and Tom were riding their bikes in the deserted community of summer homes. It was early November and just about all the fair-weather residents were long gone.

The asphalt bike path wound in all directions through the large complex, which included an 18-hole golf course. They had it all to themselves. There were little signs every once in a while showing the way to "The Nature Center" or "The Marina" or "The Amphitheater" or some other place.

It was cold, cold enough to snow. But not today. The sky above the tall trees was clear.

“Let’s go down to the river,” Tom said, not waiting for Jerry to answer.

“It’s all right with me,” Jerry said, following close behind.

It was all the same to him. He was a city kid and it was fun just being out here in the forest with his cousin.

The ducks floated on the icy waters among the reeds. The boys got off their bikes and started skipping stones, trying to reach the far shore.

“Oh, good one!” Tom said. “Boy’s got an arm on him.”

In the distance a lone wolf or coyote howled.

“We better start getting back,” Tom said. “The night comes fast out here in the forest, especially at this time of year.”

“It’s all right with me,” Jerry said again. It was a line from an old movie his father liked to watch.

Jerry looked up from the water and noticed that the sun had gone down behind the trees across the way. They got on their bikes and rode.

They passed some places they had seen coming in. Jerry could see Tom’s breath blowing behind him.

“Let’s take this shortcut,” Tom said.

“It’s all right with me,” Jerry said.

They kept peddling in the growing shadows.

After a while, Tom slowed down and then stopped.

“Wassup?” Jerry asked.

“This is real stupid right here, dog, but I think I’m lost,” Tom said.

“That is stupid, man,” Jerry said, slapping his cousin on the head and laughing. “But not as stupid as you sayin’ ‘dog’ trying to sound all citi-fied or something. Plus, you live here.”

“I know I live here,” Tom said. “But we just moved here two weeks ago.”

“C’mon, let’s find the way,” Jerry said.

They rode for several more minutes. It was dark now. Jerry had to focus hard to see where he was going.

“Can’t you see anything that looks familiar?” he shouted.

“That’s the problem,” Tom said. “It all looks the same.”

“It’s all right with me,” Jerry said, but he didn’t mean it anymore. He didn’t want to spend the night out here in the dark, chilly forest.

They peddled some more and then stopped at an intersection.

“Las Vegas, 50 feet,” a sign read.

“This is nuts,” Tom said. “I know this sign wasn’t here before. Plus we’re thousands of miles from Las Vegas, not 50 feet.”

Just then they heard music playing.

Jerry recognized the song. It was an old one his dad sang sometimes.

“Ain’t nothing but a hound dog…”

The boys walked their bikes and headed toward the music.

The forest opened into a large meadow. Bright lights and loud noises filled the air.

A nine-foot tall Elvis suddenly appeared in front of Tom.

“I’m in the mood for a peanut butter banana bacon sandwich,” Elvis said. “But you’ll have to do.”

He then leaned over and bit off Tom’s head.

Jerry started screaming.

Such Sweet Sorrow

Roland Bartholomew didn't exist. It wasn't so much that the 15-year-old was unpopular in school as that he went utterly unnoticed. He had no friends and no enemies. To teachers he was just another name on the roll sheet. He floated through his days as if he simply wasn't there.

The only thing that gave Roland's life meaning was art. He loved to study art history and he loved to paint. He spent most of his free time hanging out at art galleries and museums.

One rainy November day Roland was strolling through an exhibit of Victorian art at the Portland Art Museum. He was pretty much bored out of his mind. Roland wasn't big on the style of romantic realism represented in the majority of the paintings. He was more into edgier artists like Magritte, Picasso, Munch, and Chagall.

"This is way too sappy," he said under his breath.

But just as Roland was about to make a quick exit, something caught his eye.

It was a work entitled *Romeo and Juliet* painted in 1884 by a Sir Frank Dicksee. The two young lovers in the painting were kissing while Romeo sat atop a balcony. A flowery green vine wrapped its way up a nearby marble column. The dawn sky and

the red terracotta rooftops of northern Italy could be seen in the background. But it was Juliet, in her long nightgown and downy beauty, who drew Roland's attention.

She stabbed at his chest like a knife and all his loneliness came bleeding out.

"She's so—" Roland whispered, fighting the lump in his throat, "*beautiful*."

His heart immediately ached for her. He was filled with a kind of longing he had never known before.

Roland began spending more and more time at the museum, standing dumbstruck in front of the painting. Minutes and hours and days went by like this. During non-museum hours, he read and reread *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare.

Then one day while he was standing there gazing at his true love, something strange happened. Something strange and amazing.

For a second, he found himself *in* the painting, in Romeo's shoes, kissing Juliet. Pressing her close to him, smelling her perfect skin, tasting her sweet lips.

At first Roland, knees still shaking, wasn't sure what had happened. He was just grateful for the joy he had experienced and that his imagination had grown so strong.

Over the coming weeks, this scene was repeated several more times. Each kiss was sweeter and lasted longer than the last.

Roland began to live for these all too brief moments of bliss. Unable to compete, the real world drifted away. Imaginary or

not, for the first time in his life Roland was happy. But time was running out. The exhibit was set to move on to another museum in another city.

Roland wasn't sure what to do. Following Juliet around the world was not realistic. While he might be able to sneak off to San Francisco—the exhibit's next stop—a few times, what would happen when she traveled to Asia or went back home to England? Stealing the painting wasn't in the cards either. This was real life and he was no Thomas Crown.

At first, he bought a poster of the painting and took it home, hoping to recreate the magic. He stared and stared, but it was no use. He couldn't duplicate the experience. It didn't work.

Next he tried to paint it himself. Since he had never painted something in this style, he held out little hope. But in the end he was surprised that it looked as good as it did. The background was almost a perfect reproduction of the original. But try as he might, Roland just couldn't capture Juliet's beauty and the tender passion of the kiss the way Dicksee had. And more importantly he couldn't transport himself inside his own painting the way he did with the one at the museum.

Then he had an idea.

Maybe if I concentrate hard enough I can stay in the painting not just for a few seconds, Roland thought, *but forever*.

On the last day before the exhibit was scheduled to move on to the next museum,

Roland skipped school and spent the entire day in front of the painting. He pretended he was there on a field trip.

"The museum's closing, son," a security guard said after the sun had gone down.

"Farewell, farewell!" Roland whispered. "One kiss and I'll descend."

"It's time to go," the man said, walking up from behind and putting his hand on Roland's shoulder.

A moment later the guard heard a girl screaming. It was a terrible, agonizing howl that shook the large room. The guard thought the sound had originated from the wall behind the painting. He took a few steps toward it.

"What was that?" he said.

When the security guard turned back around, Roland was gone.

***

Lost in the kiss, Roland suddenly felt something pull him from behind and he lost his balance. In an instant, he was falling back, head over heels, down toward the ground. The Verona sky above her, Juliet's beautiful and haunted face was the last thing he saw. He heard her scream. In vain, his hand reached up for her. A moment later he hit the ground, breaking his neck.

Everything went black.

***

The next morning the museum was in full-blown pandemonium. One of the paintings, valued at several million dollars, had been stolen.

It was *Romeo and Juliet*.

The authorities were baffled. The security cameras hadn't captured anything unusual. A teenage boy and a security guard were the last people seen near it. The only clear fact was that at some point during the night, the original had somehow been replaced with a blatant forgery.

But why would the thief or thieves bother to leave behind a fake that was so obviously different? While it was true that the new painting was quite similar to the original in most ways, it contained one glaring difference that could not go unnoticed: Romeo was missing. Juliet now stood on the balcony alone, looking down at something on the ground with an expression of grief-stricken horror.

Perhaps just as strange was the fact that tests later showed the oils and the canvas to be from the original period—*almost 130 years old*. And experts agreed that everything about the painting suggested that it was in fact the work of Frank Dicksee, who had been dead for more than 80 years.

The original was never found. And Roland Bartholomew was never seen again.

The Big Comeback

I had to come back.

I couldn't let her crime go unpunished.

I think that's why I *woke* up.

I woke up in the dark. It took a while for my senses to return. There didn't seem to be any oxygen in the small box. At first I began to panic. And then I realized I didn't need to breathe anymore. My lungs were just so much stuffing now. My heart was in pieces. A million pieces. She had seen to that. Good thing I didn't need it anymore either.

I began to push up on the lid. It took a long time, but I finally heard the wood

crack. And then the dirt poured in. The dirt was easier to go through, but there was more of it. But I had time. Lots of time.

I made it to the surface as the sun was coming up. The caretaker screamed and ran off when he saw me.

I walked down the street. The few people out at that hour crossed to the opposite sidewalk when they saw me coming.

I walked and walked and walked. I stuck to alleys and side streets when possible. I stumbled and staggered and slowed near the end. Not from fatigue but from decay. But as the first star came out, I turned on to her street.

"I'm coming, Julia," I whispered.

What was left of my brain, my brain, my brain choked its grip around how she had told me she couldn't love me. She had laughed at me.

"Not if you were the last creep on earth," she had said.

That's when I began to die.

"Creep's coming, Julia," I hissed as a wobbled up her driveway.

I pushed the doorbell and my finger fell off.

She answered the door. Then took a step back.

I reached for her and keeled over.

She gasped and tried to scream but her heart had stopped.

She crumbled down on top of me.

“Who’s creepy now?” I sighed, as I stroked her hair. “Who’s creepy and dead like me?”

Doppel Mangler

Greer liked living out in the country. She hated those suburban developments closer to town with the houses built a few feet away from one another. Those houses only had views of other houses. Even though it was a 30-minute commute every morning and night to get to her job at the attorney's office, Greer didn't mind. At least at the end of the day, she had a view of trees and hills.

She was driving home from work one night. It was getting dark out on the country road, and Greer was driving fast. It had been

a long day, and all she wanted to do was go home and curl up on the couch with a cup of tea and her cat, Mr. Bollers.

Suddenly, a car zoomed by, going toward town. Greer hadn't seen it coming, and the revving of its engine jarred her.

"That was mighty nerve-racking," she said out loud, her heart pounding in her chest.

A short time later, another car sped by, again coming out of nowhere. Greer caught the color and make. It was a green Honda Accord. Just like her car.

"Those crazy kids," she muttered. "I have a mind to report them to the police when I get home."

Greer kept driving.

A minute later, another green Accord came at her. But instead of some *crazy kid*, an old woman was behind the wheel.

Still another car came blowing past her a few seconds after that. It was the same make as all the previous cars.

This time, Greer was able to make out the license plate number as the car came toward her.

"WTF 75... 9. Wait a minute, that's mi __"

She never finished the thought.

They had to fish the car and Greer's lifeless body from a large pond below the road.

The driver of the Dodge she almost hit told police she had crossed the middle of the

road and drifted into the oncoming lane just as he was passing.

"I was able to see her face clearly as she came at me," he said. "It's almost like she had been distracted by something on the road. Though what it was I could not say.

"We were the only two cars for miles and miles."

Something in the Snow

There was something in the snow. Something alive.

It caused the snow to move and clump together in strange formations like when the cat leaves something behind in the litter box.

They looked like badly made snowmen. Three arms here. Two heads there.

And then the *snowmen* began to move. They began to move toward the house.

Closer and closer they came. Closer and closer…

The Ferryman

Wesley Johnson stood on the shores of a dark river. He couldn't remember how he got there. He just felt tired. More tired than he had ever felt in his entire life.

He dropped down to his knees. He could see his face, illuminated by the moonlight, reflected in the water below. He looked pale and something seemed to be wrong with his head. When he reached up to touch it, his fingers made a squishing sound.

"That doesn't sound too good," Wesley said. "Funny how it doesn't hurt."

Just then, someone came up next to him.

"Hello, young man," an old woman said. "Do you have a coin I could borrow?"

"What?" Wesley said. "What do you need a coin for out here?"

"To pay the ferryman," she said. "I can't understand how I forgot to bring some money. I never leave home without it."

Wesley dug in his pocket and held out two shiny silver dollars. The old woman's trembling fingers felt ice cold.

"Thank you, young man," she said, taking one. She began to laugh and then started coughing, a gurgling sound coming from her chest.

"That cough doesn't sound good," Wesley said.

“I don’t pay it no mind,” she said. “Oh, look, there’s our ride.”

Wesley looked out onto the water and could barely make out a boat approaching through the dark.

“Have your coin ready,” the old woman said.

The boatman wore a long black robe and the hood covered his face.

“All aboard,” the ferryman said in a tired, ancient voice.

The old woman stepped in and handed over her dollar. Not sure what to do, Wesley followed her. He held out his coin. A hand poked out of the man’s robe and took the coin. Wesley thought it strange that there was no skin on the hand, just bones.

“What the—” Wesley said.

He squinted in the darkness as the ferryman turned toward him. All there was under the hood was a grinning skull!

"I don't want to go!" Wesley suddenly screamed, trying to get off the boat.

"It's out of your hands now," the skeleton man said, pushing Wesley down.

The boat began crossing the river. Wesley kept screaming…

***

At the Eternal Rest Mortuary, two men bent over a body.

"Looks like this one needs to be cremated," the older one said, looking at a chart.

"Hey, why do they put those coins over the eyes?" the younger man asked.

“You don’t see this too much anymore, but there are a couple of explanations,” the older man said. “One is that sometimes people die with their eyes open and the coins help to keep the eyelids closed.”

“What’s the other?” the younger man said.

“Well, according to Greek mythology, the dead need to pay the ferryman who takes them across the river that separates the living from the dead.”

“What happens if you don’t have the money?”

“If you can’t pay, you’re condemned to wander the shores for a hundred years,” the older man said. “Anyway, I don’t think this poor fellow will need these where he’s going.”

He then removed the heavy silver dollars from the corpse's eyes and slipped them into his pocket. Suddenly, the dead man's eyes and mouth popped open.

"He looks like he's about to scream," the younger man said.

"Can you blame him?" the older man said.

He switched on the oven.

Jake and Tony

The boys stared at the rock etched with the name.

“Creepy,” Jake said.

Tony ran his finger over the bumpy granite. It chilled him to the bone.

“It looks just like a tombstone,” Jake said, nervously looking at Tony.

“Sure does.”

The two boys had left their scouting group to explore around the campsite. They had been out in the Montana wilderness for over a week now on a canoe trip. Tomorrow was their last day.

“Just a weird coincidence I guess,” Tony finally said, zipping up his jacket.

But Tony’s eyes were wide and black as he stared at the strange rock. The rock, miles from civilization, had a name engraved on it. And not just any name, but his name: Tony Miller.

“One of the guys is just messing with you,” Jake said. “We better get back.”

“Yeah, they can be jerks sometimes,” Tony said.

They walked back to camp as the night air settled in.

Both boys had trouble sleeping. Neither could shake that terrible image of the rock. Jake was worried about his best friend and happy that they would be heading home

tomorrow. Tomorrow night they would be sleeping in their own beds.

The next morning they broke camp early, ready for the whitewater. Running the rapids would be the hardest part of the trip, but also the most exciting.

“Okay, boys, gather ‘round,” Scout Leader Dave said. “Young men, this is some serious river now. There will be danger involved. We don’t want you getting thrown in the water and lost forever. Listen to the adults.”

The canoes pushed off. It was their turn to ride in the larger, three-man canoe, which was good because they would be together. But the canoe, nicknamed The Bathtub, was hard to steer. This troubled Jake even more.

At first the water was slow and peaceful, meandering past tall pines and grassy meadows. But soon the sound of rapids roared up ahead.

“Paddle left, boys,” Dave yelled over the thunderous river. It sounded like they were heading toward Niagara Falls. Jake was in the front. His heart was pounding as their canoe picked up speed and plunged into the foamy water. But they stayed in the main channel and shot the rapids easily. Soon they were back on calm waters, all six canoes together, cheering and howling.

“That was the best!” Jake shouted. They all gave each other high fives with their paddles.

Soon, they heard the next set of rapids, which were even louder.

“These will be the hardest, boys,” shouted Dave. “We need to stay away from the big boulder in the middle of the river.”

The river was faster than ever, their canoe gliding quickly over giant waves.

“Paddle harder, Jake! Look where we’re heading!”

This was bad, Jake thought. They were flying towards the huge boulder and Jake couldn’t stop thinking about Tony. Tony in church. Tony lying in a coffin. Tony pale, dead and still on white satin. He tried to push down these awful thoughts but the water was so fast and so strong that his fear was out of control. He could see Tony’s mom crying. He could see them at the gravesite. He could see that awful rock being placed on top of Tony’s grave.

“Come on! We’re going right into it!” Dave yelled as water splashed into the canoe, soaking them.

The canoe lunged to the left, almost tipping over. Although Dave kept yelling, Jake could only hear the ferocious roar of the river. His mouth was bone dry. He couldn’t swallow, couldn’t even scream. He didn’t know where the boulder was anymore or if anybody else was even still in the canoe behind him. Tony must have fallen out. Tony must be dead. That rock had warned us, Jake thought, we should have listened.

But soon the river was calm again. They had missed the rock! He turned around quickly, surprised to see that Tony and Dave were still in the boat.

“Tony!” Jake said. “You’re okay! You made it!”

Tony smiled weakly, giving a thumbs up.

“Good job, boys,” Dave said, wiping his sweaty face with his arm and catching his breath. “That was too close.”

Later, after they had pulled off, Tony patted Jake on the back.

“Thanks, dude. I know you were looking after me. Let’s never talk about the rock again. That was just too weird.”

“Deal,” said Jake.

But the deal only lasted until that night, when Tony called Jake late.

“That gravestone was right,” Tony said, his voice shaking. “It was right.”

“What are you talking about?” Jake said.

“When I got home, my mom told me to sit down,” Tony said. “She said my uncle had a heart attack last night. He’s dead.”

“That’s awful news,” Jake said. “But what does that have to do with the rock we saw out there?”

“You don’t understand,” Tony said. “I was named after him. His name was Tony Miller, too. Just like on that tombstone.”

The Old Graveyard

The old graveyard is a scary place at night.

No matter how hard the wind blows, it can't blow away the sad truth and the rotting smell of endless nothingness.

In the morning, the dead flowers are scattered hither and dither, but the coffins are still there, down in the ground. Leaking. The skin and the bones and the worms, getting wet.

The dead in the dark, wishing and waiting, hoping there is some truth to those

zombie movies. Dreaming of the sun. Wondering what brains taste like.

The old graveyard is a scary place at night.

Especially if you're dead.

The old graveyard is a scary place at night. And it's always night, when you're dead.

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Dead.

Dead.

Bloody World (Continued)

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